

Maurice Hinchey NEWS

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HINCHEY CALLS FOR EMERGENCY RELIEF TO LOCAL FARMERS, DELIVERS FUNDING TO MAKE FARMERS' MARKET ACCESSIBLE TO LOW-INCOME RESIDENTS

POUGHKEEPSIE – U.S. Rep. Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today met with local farmers at the Poughkeepsie Farmers' Market to discuss the need for federal emergency aid to help them recover from crop losses caused by severe weather. Hinchey also highlighted the role that farmers' markets play in providing highly nutritious food to low-income and elderly families, and discussed federal funding he secured in an appropriations bill last fall to make it easier for low-income families to purchase food at New York's farmers' markets.

"Farmers in the Hudson Valley, particularly apple growers, are facing another year of profound losses. This is compounded by the serious crop losses in each of the past several years from severe weather and from unfair trade practices in the global markets," said Hinchey. "I'm very pleased that the funding I worked hard to secure in the last two budget cycles is finally reaching local growers, but the need is great again this year. That's why I am fighting for \$250 million in emergency federal aid for fruit and other specialty crop growers in this year's Agriculture Appropriations bill. Without immediate assistance, we know that more family farms in the Hudson Valley will be forced out of business."

Weather-related damage to apple farms in the Hudson Valley this year has caused an estimated \$65 million in losses. In July, Hinchey offered an amendment during the House Appropriations Committee's consideration of the 2003 Agriculture Appropriations bill that would have provided \$250 million in emergency aid. That amendment failed by a vote of 29-31, but Hinchey has pledged to offer the amendment on the House floor when Congress returns from its August recess. The Hinchey Amendment would provide assistance to all specialty crop farms that suffered at least a 25 percent crop loss. All of the apple growers in the Hudson Valley would meet that criterion.

Until fiscal year 2001, the federal government had never provided assistance to specialty crop farmers like apple growers. A member of the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, Hinchey wrote the amendment that changed that practice and provided \$138 million in assistance for growers who had experienced consecutive years of

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weather-related crop losses and record low prices. In the 2002 fiscal year, Hinchey succeeded in securing \$75 million in emergency funds, and successfully advocated the inclusion of \$94 million for apple growers in the farm bill passed earlier this year.

Hinchey also highlighted his support for federal programs that make farmers' markets more accessible to low-income and elderly families. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) manages two programs, the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program and the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, which provide vouchers to purchase locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables. Hinchey fought a Bush Administration proposal to eliminate these programs early this year.

"It's inconceivable to me that the Department of Agriculture would eliminate these nutrition programs," said Hinchey. "These programs give people who are struggling to make ends meet access to fresh, nutritious food. They have been a tremendous success for farmers and for those who are given the means with which to buy their products, particularly in New York."

Eight hundred New York farmers and 239 farmers' markets in the state were certified under these programs in 2001. Almost 400,000 New Yorkers received vouchers and made almost \$6 million worth of purchases with them. Nationwide nearly 2.7 million recipients made purchases totaling over \$31 million. New York ranked highest in the country in total purchases under the programs. President Bush's budget proposed eliminating all funding for both the WIC and the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition programs, but funding for the programs was restored by the Appropriations Committee.

Hinchey secured \$100,000 in last year's Agriculture Appropriations bill for a pilot program that allows farmers to use wireless handheld technology to conduct electronic transactions in open-air markets, such as those in Poughkeepsie and Kingston. Elizabeth Ryan, a Rhinebeck farmer who participates in the Poughkeepsie Farmers' Market, demonstrated its use today.

"These programs make it easier for farmers' markets to flourish," Hinchey said. "They also help farmers by putting 100 percent of these food dollars into their pockets. I'm fighting to make sure they continue."